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The Cross
Its Blessing
and Ban ✠



By ✠ The Rev Dr
Morgan Dix ✠



Blessing and Ban

FROM THE

Cross of Christ

MEDITATIONS

ON THE SEVEN WORDS ON THE CROSS

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BY

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Introduction.

IN the good Providence of God, we are permitted once again to keep watch during the hours of Good Friday around the Cross of Christ. We look, by faith, to the time when we shall see the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and shall behold Him whom they pierced on His return to judge the earth and the world by fire. Until that day the servants can do no more than to heed and follow His command: "What I say unto you I say unto all, Watch." And therefore are we here to watch, with fear, with hope, with love, with searchings of heart, where our Lord was crucified.

It has usually been our custom to endeavour to transfer ourselves to that scene

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during the hours of the most dread Passion ; to try to see Him on the Cross, and to imagine ourselves among that wild, disorderly throng which then possessed the place. Jesus Himself, all wounds and blood, was the object of our attention ; and from the Blessed Feet up to the Head, we drew our lesson of the horror of sin, the love of God, the peril of those who stand apart and refuse this great salvation. But now let us change the hour and look at Calvary from another point of view. Let us suppose that the day is far spent, and that it is towards evening. The sun, long hidden, has set ; the stars are beginning to appear ; the moon makes light in the sky. The Passion is over ; the crowds have gone ; the Roman soldiers have marched off. The hill is now desolate, and silence reigns upon the land. The crosses, three in number, stand where they were ; but the bodies, at the request of the scrupulous Sabbath-keepers, have been taken away. These instruments of suffering and

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death are now the only objects on which the eye may rest; and two of them are soon forgotten, as the view of the one in the midst absorbs the powers of memory and thought. Here is that Holy Cross on which did die the Lamb of God, the Altar on which was offered, once for all, the full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice for the sin of the whole world. Here is that gift which men prepared for their Saviour, in acknowledgment of what He had done for them, in testimony of their estimate of what He deserved to receive in return at their hands. On this hard frame of wood was He nailed up, a spectacle to the world and to angels and to men. There did He show the breadth of His love to sinners; there did He part from those whom, having loved in this world, He loved unto the end; and then, after going through such horror of great darkness as no fancy fathoms, did He announce the consummation of the end and yield up His spirit to the Father. With thoughts and recollections of

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all this we now view that Cross, which stands, empty, silent, and portentous, in its place as the night creeps forward; and it speaks to us of many things, and its lessons sink into the soul and spirit, and they are for all ages and generations till the end. For what does this Cross stand? What does it mean? Of what, as a symbol, does it preach? What truths does it tell, what falsehoods contradict, what hopes inspire? What things does this object teach us which no other object ever did or ever can? What in our life do we owe distinctly to the Cross as the representative of ideas, principles, motives without which our life would be undistinguishable from that of those who know not God? What and how much would go out of our life if the Cross were to cease and disappear, leaving for us other symbols and other inspirations? Many are astray in this world; many wander; many are stumbling on the dark mountains. Many wait for light, but behold obscurity; for brightness, but they walk in

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darkness. They grope for the wall like the blind; they grope as if they had no eyes. They stumble at noonday as in the night. They are in desolate places, as dead men. We meet such persons every day. Now and then some of that number come to us and ask why we are not like themselves, what the Cross does for us, why we trust it as we do—men and women who would also have that peace if they could find it, that peace which none ever find away from Jesus Christ, and Him crucified. We would invite these seekers after the truth to come apart with us, and meditate of the meaning of the Cross. Our Lord is seen by the bodily eye no more; He is gone into heaven, there to appear in the Presence of God for us; and, earnestly as we long for one view or even, might it be, for one glimpse of Him, to steady, support, help us on our way, the time for that is not come. But His symbol is always before our eyes. It is, strangely, stamped on many an object in the natural

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world. It reads itself into every man's experience, and tells him wondrous things in his listening soul. It is on the spires of churches; it is over the altars of His Presence; it is in our houses, our oratories; it is on the flags of many a Christian nation; it is a sign in earth, sea, and sky, which none can overlook. And it speaks; it tells truth; it reads lessons. What is its voice? What are those truths? What are those lessons? Let us, in the twilight of Good Friday, and now in the Presence of the Lord, with His Eye upon us, try to answer those questions, for the good of our own souls, and for the help of those whom we perhaps may bring to Jesus out of the darkness and distraction of their life. And to that end, and in order that we may better take in these lessons, it is proposed, in the meditations of this day, to look at the bare and silent Cross, and to hearken to the double voices which go from it. That Cross doth both bless and ban; it is both light and darkness. On one side, it

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gives the blessing of peace ; on another side, it carries the curse of God. We shall try to hear that twofold voice : to feel what the Cross is for good to the believer, and what for ill to the ungodly ; its power to help, its power to cast down and overthrow ; its preciousness to the men of faith, its dire utterance to those described as the enemies of the Cross of Christ, whose end is destruction.

The First Word.

ST. LUKE XXIII. 34.

Lobe.

The First Word.

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted His raiment, and cast lots.—ST. LUKE xxiii. 34.

NONE can doubt what is the first lesson from the Cross: that of love, of unbounded charity to all. Love was the subject of the angels, who sang, the night when Jesus was born, “Peace, good will to men.” Love is almost the last word which Jesus spoke when He passed away from us in death. Thus the work of our redemption, from first to last, displayed the charity of God, and His pity and love for the children of men. Even they who nailed their Saviour to the Cross were the objects of His divine compassion: “Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”

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Ever since, the teaching of the Cross has been a teaching of the power of love. There was nothing like this of old. The world was a hard and cruel place; its records are but annals of the triumph of force, of the successful career of tyrants, the oppression of the weak, the taking vengeance on enemies. The history of far-off days takes shape in four or five great empires, each built upon the overthrow of its predecessor. A prophet, in his vision by night, beholds the four winds of heaven striving upon the great sea, and then great beasts come up from the sea, each strong and fierce, till one appears, dreadful and terrible, and strong exceedingly, which devours and breaks in pieces. This is the world force consolidated for grinding down and destroying the weak, and its maxims are hate, jealousy, revenge. And this force, as is its wont, gathers itself up and strikes at God when He comes here to help and save; and it is met by the spirit which thinketh no evil and hateth nothing that God has

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made. Of love, the infinite, the amazing love of Christ, the Cross speaks to us as the day of the Passion ends and deep stillness holds the land.

That lesson ! The Cross has gone on teaching it nearly two thousand years. Has it been taught in vain ? Yes, apparently so ; it is neither soon learned nor easily learned. Two thousand years of instruction from this Master, and how little progress we have made ! Do not fall into the error of thinking that Christ expected the world to follow Him, to adopt His principles, to keep His laws, to take upon it His yoke. The world has never done that—has never thought of doing that. The whole world still lieth in wickedness, although the Son of God is come. The passions of the natural heart, still active everywhere, attest that in it there is no change. None should be looked for, except as here and there a particular heart is touched, a special and elect soul is converted to God. The world is still a hard and cruel

place. The spirit of the age is not a spirit of love, or, if of love, then of love of self, not love of God or of man, for God's sake and in God. The Cross stands among us, as it stood in that evening of the First Age, rebuking and convicting of sin. It watches the indifference of the rich to the sorrows of the poor, the hatred of the poor burning against the comfortable and luxurious rich. It watches the revival of the spirit of brutality among us, shown in the passion for dangerous sports. It watches the diabolical cruelties practised on innocent animals in the name of scientific investigation. It watches the packing of men, women, and children into great cities, where they can scarce breathe or move, and cannot be said to live, for this degraded and deplorable condition scarce deserves the name of life. It watches upon the multiform shapes of envy, malice, rivalry, competition, under which men afflict and grieve one another and make one another unhappy. Do you blame the Cross for looking

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on all this so calmly—for not serving as a talisman to exorcise all the foul spirits of the time? If so, you expect of the Cross what you have no right to expect. Nowhere is the conversion of the world promised. Nothing on record by Him or His Apostles leads us to expect a general and radical change in man, by which the earth shall be turned to Paradise, and its tenants to lovely and angelic beings devoted to one another in the love of their Lord. Christ has done great things for us. His teachings and example have to a large extent ameliorated the condition of mankind. There are earnest efforts here and there to follow Him, to realise His life, to be, so far as may be, like Him. But the world, as such, is not reached; now and again the old passions break out, the worst of the dreadful past comes back; and the value of the Cross is this: that it keeps the divine ideals before us, while society denies their beauty and sets up its idols in their place. We are before the Cross, not as if to

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look for some sudden miracle to be wrought through it, but simply to study it, to muse of what it means, and to save ourselves from the sin and loss of forgetting the truth and taking up with a falsehood in place of it. Know this, that apart from the doctrine of the Cross there is no remedy for the evil done through want of charity. There is no change in the hearts of men between the old days and our own, save what divine grace may have wrought. We need the teaching of the Cross to assure us that no change will ever come on us by any other instrument or in any other way. That is the first lesson from this symbol, for society as for us each apart. Love is the greatest thing of all, the first thing needed to make the world better. The Cross has taught that lesson widely, and yet, take the world all through, the men who have learned it are but a handful. To the masses it is an unknown tongue, a speech not understood of them. Nothing but divine and holy love will help the world; and yet

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men love themselves first, and their neighbours afterwards to such extent as may not prove inconvenient, and God not at all. One of the most discouraging of the signs of the times is the extent to which the divine Saviour is left out by those who profess to be trying to help and comfort the poor. In such comfort as they give, the Saviour who loved us and bought us with His Blood is never mentioned. It is an alien speech, a foreign language, that they talk. They shun the Cross as an evil and sinister omen. To put the Cross away, out of sight, out of thought, is the object, that they may be free to teach a gospel of their own, stimulating the natural desires of the flesh. And the longer this goes on, and the further this Christless propaganda shall be pushed, the more surely shall society be turned back into the old darkness; and if the time should come when Christ and the Cross shall cease to influence the race and draw men out of the world and up to them, that hour will see

the world a hell once more, as cruel, as hopeless, as any tract where barbarism reigns triumphant, and where love, mercy, and truth are dead. Nothing can stay the flood of sin, lust, envy, wrath, but that strong barrier which Christ built in His time and whereon He planted the image of the Cross.

Fear not. Whatever changes are at hand, whatever course the ungodly may run, the Cross can never be removed from sight. It stands in the gathering twilight of modern heathenism, just where it did of old, preaching of many things necessary for these times, and, first, of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, without which whatsoever liveth is counted dead before God.

The Second Word.

ST. LUKE XXIII. 42, 43.

Immortality.

The Second Word.

And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when Thou comest into Thy kingdom.

And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.—ST. LUKE xxiii. 42, 43.

WE have heard the first of the messages and reproofs from the Cross. Listen, for the second comes. After each word of Christ there is silence, and in that silence is heard, first, one special teaching from His Cross, which teaching is to go on till the end of the world, and, secondly, some special reproof and rebuke, which likewise shall find its mark in sinful men as long as time shall last. Do not mistake the meaning of this instrument on which the Lord suffered. It represents His mercy; it equally displays His just and righteous judgment upon every

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soul of man that doeth evil. In our meditation to-day we take its messages all together, whether they comfort in trouble, or whether they convict of sin.

And so the first message was that love is the strongest power in the universe, and the only principle that can set right the hardness, injustice, cruelty, of the world; and the corresponding warning was this, that whosoever tries to set the world right on any other principle, and without the help of the Cross of Christ, is doomed to end in total and final and hopeless failure. Now let us see what message comes, and what reproof comes, after the utterance of the second word of Christ.

Men have no stronger, no more urgent need than this: to know if there be another life. It is an importunate demand, which may be stilled for a while when cares dull spiritual perception and pleasures stupefy the higher nature; but it comes back, that question: "*If a man die, shall he live again?*"

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No question calls so loudly for an answer; none is so plainly, so definitely answered elsewhere. There is somewhat startling in the way in which the answer is given.

What happened that day on Calvary? Two men were dying with Christ, the one on the right hand, the other on the left. To one of those men it was announced that he should live, though death meanwhile had come; that he should retain his conscious being; that he should find himself in a certain place, which Jesus named; that he should be there in the company of the Lord; and that all this should be on that same day, and on that very afternoon, and before the sun was set. It would not be possible to put a promise into words more exact than these, and the substance thereof we take to be so plain that it cannot be misunderstood. The reward of repentance, faith, love, humility, is sure. It is to be enjoyed in the rest of Paradise. And therefore to the Cross as now it stands before us, unfolding its meanings one by one,

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we owe a perfectly clear and delightful view of a realm of rest and peace beyond these scenes.

We owe this assurance to the Cross and what it stands for. No such assurance existed of old. Immortality was hardly believed by the wise. The poets sang of it, and popular notions of Elysian fields, and shadows of departed heroes, and images of ancestors caught up into the air and set among the stars, were held, with base, degrading conceptions of migration of souls of men into the carcasses of beasts; but as to a distinct and intelligent knowledge of the future, there was none. Not till Jesus came, and lived, and died, and rose again, were life and immortality brought to light.

This is the second message of the Cross, the announcement of the world beyond the tomb. Now let us hear the reproof from the Cross. It takes the old familiar shape of wondering remonstrance: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?"

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Are we not sometimes fearful? Are we not often doubtful? Do we not, now and then, wish for some sign that it is surely true? A horrible dread will occasionally steal over the soul and make the heart grow cold. The men in the old pagan days did not half believe in immortality. The men in these days of revival of pagan ideas do not believe it. You hear of services at the burial of the dead in which not a word is spoken to intimate a belief in anything to follow but the decomposition of the body and the dissipation of the spiritual element in il-limitable space. Sternly speaks the Cross to us, who, no matter to what extent, are influenced by this revival of the worst of doubts, the doubt of our own reality and the truth of that God to whom all live. Why should the dread steal over you? Why should you say, "It seems so hard to believe, too precious to be true; I wish I could feel sure"? And why are you not sure? Can any words be more exact than those, "To-day shalt thou

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be with Me in Paradise"? Are they not decisive of every question you can raise, save one? the fact, the place, the time, all stated with distinctness, all plain as words could make them? Why do you fear? What more evidence can you reasonably demand? Is it that one might come back from the grave, and show himself alive, and convince men of the truth? That also has occurred. ONE has come back—the same who spoke the words. Still you cannot feel sure? Nothing, then, could assure you. Unbelief would not trust its own eyes against its obdurate refusal to take God's word for truth, and so unbelief is hopeless.

How precious is this assurance from the Cross! And yet how darkly does that same Cross frown on a world which, after all this, will not believe! How threateningly does that Cross loom before our eyes when we give way to doubt of the truth of its message! If you, the redeemed of Christ, His favoured and elect children,

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are still so half-hearted, so fearful, you do not deserve the comfort, the cheer, the joy which the Gospel words convey. We owe to Jesus Christ our certainty of the life to come. If we will not accept His declaration as evidence, we cannot have, from any quarter, the proof of that of which we long to feel sure. Reason fails; logic fails; science fails. No man, however wise and learned, can by searching find out God. No man can, by process of argument alone, prove the existence of a Paradise, a Heaven, a Hell, or any particular of a life of the world to come. Jesus Christ, and only He, can do that for us. And we are condemned to the righteous judgment of God if we let that truth go. We must guard it as by far the dearest of our possessions. We must keep our faith alive and warm by practice in the nearness of that other world; by acting honestly and simply, as men who believe it; by daily thought of it; especially by a bond of prayer linking us closely with the tenants of

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the home beyond. We must not think of our dead as dead, but as alive unto God. They must have their old place in our hearts, in our prayers. May light perpetual shine on them ! Such, for them, be our continual request to God.

This Cross, now vacant and still in the gathering dusk, stands like a monument on the grave of one blessed and happy soul saved by his simple, earnest faith in the Redeemer. From it, however, falls a black shadow on another grave—that of a lost companion, who died in sin, unrepentant, unabsolved, an alien and a stranger. The light and the darkness both touch us where we stand : light in the message of the sweet and blessed country, darkness our everlasting portion if we refuse to walk in the light of the Lord.

The Third Word.

ST. JOHN XIX. 26, 27.

The Home.

The Third Word.

When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple standing by, whom He loved, He saith unto His mother, Woman, behold thy son !

Then saith He to the disciple, Behold thy mother ! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home.

ST. JOHN xix. 26, 27.

Now comes to us from the Cross a teaching on a subject among the most vital ; and now descends a rebuke on the madness which sends men beyond the reach of God, on the track opened by passion and self-will. The Home, the primal institution of the Lord in the days of man's innocency ; the church within the Church, whereof the bands are love and sacrifice ; whose guardian is the Cross, emblem of discipline and represser of passion ; the Home, which, resting for two thousand years on the sacramental foundation

of divine gift and grace, is now threatened by the denial of that gift and grace, and the substitution of the will of the flesh, the selfishness of degraded souls, and the restless desire of hearts and wills making pleasure the final end of existence.

The Home was God's own institution; but, like all His works, this was early defaced by sin: polygamy, adultery, wrecked it, as they ever must; and then false ideas of the relations of God's children broke up the sanctity of that place; it became a theatre for the overbearing pride of man, the degradation of woman, the slavery of unhappy children. When He came hither who died for us upon this Cross, among His cares was this, to build the old wastes, to repair and restore the desolation of many generations. Jesus elevated marriage to the rank of a sacrament in His Church; He took the Home and the Family under His direct protection; He signed His sons and daughters with the sign of the Cross, and

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gave them grace so to live together in this life that in the world to come they might have life everlasting. The Cross, there as everywhere, is the symbol of the dedicated life, the guarantee of its perpetuity. Love, not passion, is the law of the home. Not till passion is transformed into the calm, steady force of love is the will of God fulfilled towards us. And the home life shall never be regarded by any one who knows the meaning of the Cross as other than a life of daily discipline. Man and woman are not joined together by the Church, for this world and for the next, in order that each may do his own will and take his own way; nor yet for a wild and reckless revel down the vale of years, with power to give each other the slip at pleasure and strike off wherever fancy bids. But man and wife are bound to practise self-denial, to crucify the flesh, to tread with awe the path of duty. They have to concede, to renounce, to give up, to live as in bonds to Christ, and to find their happi-

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ness in doing the will of God and looking to the last and supreme end of our existence—union with Him, and with each other in Him. This is the lesson of the Cross on a subject which may well engage the closest thought of the wise, the most earnest attention of the lovers of the human race. The home, the Christian home, cannot be kept without the Christian grace, and the Christian ideals, and the Christian spirit. See Blessed Mary and that disciple whom Jesus loved going quietly away, hand in hand, when all is over. “From that hour that disciple took her unto his own home,” obedient to the word, “Son, behold thy mother”; and she goes with him, the monition echoing in her heart, “Woman, Behold thy son.” Love and Sacrifice are here: Love, of which the example is before us in him who leaned on Jesus’ breast at supper; Sacrifice, perfected in her who said, at an awful moment of decision, yet without a doubt or a fear, “Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy

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word." Of these two, Love and Sacrifice, shall those homes be built in which are to be trained the men and women who shall regenerate the world. Such homes as these shall give the citizens to Christian states. Such homes as these, which nothing but death can break up, are the material of high-toned nations. Such shall be the schools and nurseries for the future tenants of the Paradise of God. The Cross is stamped, as a seal, on true love; on love as distinct from lust; on love which triumphs in temptation, and repels the storm and tempest of sin; the love which bears the signet of the Cross, is that which seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil, beareth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things. Such love is not by nature in any heart; it is the work of the Holy Ghost; it is the cement by which the walls of the Home are held together; it is the life of the household; it hath promise of this world and of the world to come. Follow

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those figures which slowly and with deep searchings of heart recede from this deserted hill. Follow them in thought, and try to picture to yourself the peace which must reign where the benediction from the Cross has made the home, and where the spirit of Jesus is the ruling power among its inmates.

While we thus reflect, the darkness deepens, and a voice of stern remonstrance and reproof is heard from that symbol of divine love. What have men done, what are they doing, with the family and the home? What wild theories are they putting forth in opposition to the message from the Cross? "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder." "Children, obey your parents in the Lord." What do we hear in contradiction to these divinely expressed obligations? What defiance of the law of God, in the laws of states whose very existence rests on that law! What approval of the substitution of passion for love! What angry expostulation on the part of

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those whom mutual affection has ceased to hold together, when forbidden to separate and seek new alliances ! What cold-blooded calculation on the ease of dissolving a union, in case things do not turn out well ! What breaking up of homes, what consecutive polygamy, what practical disinheritance of children ! What undertaking of the most serious of all imaginable engagements without one lofty, worthy motive, for a mercenary consideration, for the gratification of a transitory fancy, for an independent position, for escape from the prospect of a solitary old age, for the freedom which the married state confers ! How sternly frowns the Cross on levity such as this ! How indignantly it rejects transgressors of this class from the number of those who, as they bear the name, should bear also the marks, of the Lord Jesus. How very clear it is, as we look about us and listen and read, that a philosophy practically atheistic is doing its utmost to break up the Home, to destroy the

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Family, to alienate the wedded from each other, to tear children from the arms of their parents, on the plea that the highest end for which we can live is pleasure and selfish enjoyment, and that all should be free from every hindrance to the pursuit of the desire of their heart!

Thus, then, does this Cross of Christ, "to the Jew a stumbling-block, and to the Greek foolishness," and now so bitterly derided by the animalism and materialism of the age, stand at the very centre of that civilisation in which so many boast and so many more repose a boundless trust; and thus does it preach to us of that spirit and principle of sacrifice of which it is the perpetual expression; and thus does it warn us that, without that principle as the spring of individual and social action, the very foundations of this civilisation must be swept away. The first word of Christ inculcates the need of one all-comprehending, all-embracing charity if men are ever to be drawn together and held to-

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gether as one. The second word assures us of the rest which heart and soul desire in a peaceful state beyond these scenes. The third comes home to us as a people blessed of the Lord, yet standing only so long as they are true to His covenant and His testimonies; and warnings follow fast on promises. And so the Cross, whence those messages proceeded, has something about it at which the heart may tremble when reflecting what men will do should they ever succeed in turning the world back and hiding Calvary altogether from the sight.

The Fourth Word.

ST. MATT. XXVII. 46.

The Deepest Depth.

The Fourth Word.

And about the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani? that is to say, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?—ST. MATT. xxvii. 46.

THERE must be pause in every work of man—a time to stop, a time to leave off whatever may have occupied our thoughts or our hands, a time for retreat, retirement, and rest. Such a point have we reached in reflecting on the double messages from the naked, lonely Cross. For blessing and for ban! So was it then; so has it been; so shall it be even to the end. But now for a few minutes even the Cross shall be silent; and we, companions of the Cross, thus gathered together where it stands, or once appeared to stand, may enter into silence in our own hearts, and maintain that silence while

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something passes over the scene—something now coming upon our Blessed Lord, which is in itself so terrible, and withal so inexplicable, that nothing is left for mortal man but to hold his breath, and bow the head, and bend the knee, and wait till this last storm passes by.

Darkness seems now to be coming upon us from every side. Successive waves thereof are filling the air. Under that darkness even the Cross begins to disappear. Its outlines grow confused and dim. At last we see it no more. Behind the veil of that unearthly and supernatural darkness is going on the deepest tragedy since the world began. “Save Me, O God: for the waters are come in, even unto My soul.” “All Thy waves and storms are gone over Me.” “Thou hast laid Me in the lowest pit, in a place of darkness, and in the deep.” What meaneth this? Let the prophet answer: “He hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.” Jesus has reached a point to which

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none other of woman born ever went or ever could go. For if it were possible that human nature, as borne by any one of us, could be cut off from that God in whom we live and move and have our being, the result must be an instant resolution into its elements, and a vanishing for ever from the limits of a creation which exists only as it is in Him. It is impossible to imagine such a thing as a creature cut off from the Creator and yet surviving by itself and living in its own force and strength. So, then, Jesus has reached a point to which no man could follow Him, to which no finite mind can follow Him; not even in our thought can we so follow Him as to measure what it was. Conjecture is useless as to the meaning of that cry, "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?"

There is no lesson to be drawn from a thing absolutely inapplicable to men. There is no warning to be drawn from such an instance of solitary and unfathomable distress.

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There is nothing for us to do but to look towards that shadowy curtain, and be still.

Yet in doing so we may think—if thought must still be active—of the love of Jesus Christ for man ; that He spared not Himself, that He learned what none but God can know ; that He did this in order that He might help us. Let us try to form some picture to ourselves of what that supreme agony must have been. The earth on which we dwell is surrounded on every side by depths of space. The earth is wrapped about by clouds, the emanation from the incessant and innumerable sins of restless men. Our transgressions maintain an undrawn veil between us and the Face of God. Upon the surface of the earth, around it, and above it, layer on layer, lies this moral and spiritual darkness ; and it means universal, all-shadowing, all-oppressing Sin. Through this wrapping of expiatory darkness walked the Atoning Redeemer, the High Priest of our salvation, of whom it is

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related that He was “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,” of whom we read but once or twice in His life that He rejoiced; and, so walking, He was within the bounds which confine us, and in our place, and bearing what we bear. But all things of ours have their limits; and the darkness which can come over the spirit of a man has limits on our side, but perhaps none beyond, or none which we can comprehend. An outer darkness lies beyond, of which we, in our limited experience, know nothing. So Jesus walked up and down through the gloom where Satan’s seat is, which our sins make about us, and in which the sinner also walks, till He came to a point at which He had reached our limit and beyond which lies the unspeakable and the unknown. On still He went, until to Him, standing thus at the edge of the fallen world, a door was opened into the outer darkness, the darkness beyond—into the abyss which holds the secret of the origin of evil and the mystery thereof;

and into that abyss did He then look, with the icy wind of eternal darkness and eternal death blowing upon His wasted frame, and the horrible secret disclosed to Him and borne into His inmost being. "Save Me, O God: for the waters are come in, even unto My soul." And to that length and to such a position went the Saviour for love of the children whom He was redeeming by His Agony and Blood.

And the only other thing to think of—since curiosity must be restrained in a matter between the Eternal Father and the Eternal Son, into which no creature can enter—is the rashness, the madness, of the sinner, who, forgetful of God, trifling with God, rebelling against God, pushes on, reckless, defiant, while shadows grow ever deeper and deeper, where the light dies more and more away, nearing day by day that point where God also may forsake *him*, as He forsook His only begotten Son that day, and when nothing shall be left in the soul but a

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long and exceeding bitter cry, the wail from a darkness where the light has been extinguished and can be rekindled no more.

While we have been thus waiting the cloud is passing by; we begin to see the Cross once more—a faint appearance of misty lines, one upright, the other transverse, till the object is once more in view; and now, the Great Agony of Dereliction being over, we shall hear some added lessons, some added warnings, till the ninth hour be come.

Meanwhile let us kneel and pray.

The Fifth Word.

ST. JOHN. XIX. 28.

The Soul Athirst for God.

The Fifth Word.

After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, saith, I thirst.—ST. JOHN xix. 28.

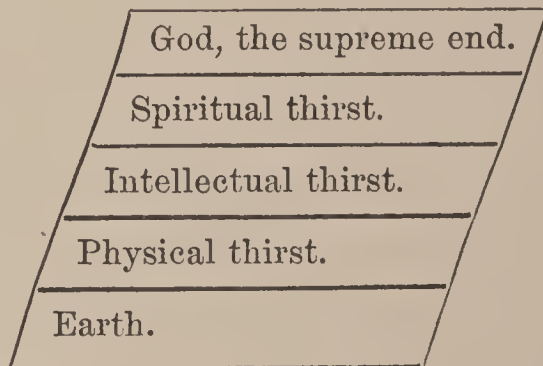
WE have heard the lamentation of Jesus on the Cross, under the torment of agonising thirst attendant on the approach of death: “I am weary of crying; My throat is dry. . . . My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and My tongue cleaveth to My gums. . . . They gave Me gall to eat: and when I was thirsty they gave Me vinegar to drink.” Now that the Passion is ended, and now that we are left with this Cross as the reminder of what has been done and suffered for us by our Lord, let us ask what this Cross has to tell us about thirst, the thirst of the body, the thirst of the mind, and the thirst

of the soul; what thirst is salutary, and what must go unslaked to all eternity.

To thirst is natural to man—a condition of his mortal state. First, it assails him through the body, an animal want. And everything must thirst that lives, from the highest to the lowest, from the lowest up to the highest, in God's creation. Below, among the very poor, thirst is another word for the need of the wherewithal to live,—the poor hardly know a higher want,—clothing sufficient to defend from cold, and food enough from day to day. As men rise above that forlorn condition, the range of desire extends: they ask for more than bodily life; they begin to see that the life is more than meat, and the body than raiment. As fast as he is relieved from anxiety about the physical, man becomes aware of his capacity for the intellectual and the spiritual; and the thirst begins for something better than bread and meat. And thence men go still higher. The final end for which we were created

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comes, first dimly, then more and more clearly, into view. Man sees God in front somewhere, and would go up to God. The bodily want is forgotten in the mental and intellectual want, and that, in turn, yields to the spiritual, until man thirsts for union with One who alone can satisfy; for our heart is restless until it rest in Thee. So on this line of thirst we can make a ladder on which travels the desire which never has ceased and never shall cease to torment the heart till it find rest in God.



Now, what of thirst in the lowest stage of all—the bodily, material, sensual life? Can that be satisfied? Hear our Lord. “Jesus, being wearied with His journey, sat by

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Jacob's well. . . . And a woman of Samaria came to draw water. . . . And Jesus said, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again." Physical thirst, ever urgent, never appeased; certain in every instance and inevitably to become distress, torment, agony, if not supplied. Man drinketh of this water from the wells of the lower life, and, though for the moment satisfied, he must in a few hours drink again, or, if not, he must die a horrible death. Now thirst like that is merely the symbol of thirst which tends towards objects lower than God. It may be fed for a time by them; it can never be sated, give it what you may. Thirst for any one object which we put in place of God is a hopeless thirst, feverish, intermittent. You think you have appeased it to some extent to-day, but to-morrow it consumes you again. You must rise above such limited desire. You must go on, far on, led by the Spirit. Do so, and at last you

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reach the point where thirst, though it cease not, becomes a joy, refreshing, not tormenting, when you are weary. Thirst for any lower object of desire, and you shall never be filled, nor shall your thirst be stayed. Let go that object; climb the height above you towards which the Spirit is drawing you. You shall attain a point at which to thirst is not to suffer, but to receive of the fulness of Him that filleth all in all.

Again let us hear the Master's voice: "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life." And again: "Blessed are they that do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled." Such thirst as this is the life of loving souls: "Like as the hart desireth the water-brooks, so longeth my soul after Thee, O God. My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." They

who so thirst have the promise, “and they shall be filled.” “They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more.”

Hear the reproach of the Cross, how it rebukes the desire of man for that which can neither satisfy nor be satisfied, which leaves a continually recurring pain, a void which nothing can fill. Such is the thirst for the gratification of fleshly appetite and carnal desire, after which men turn from their very selves in shame and remorse, yet only soon to go back for a new draught of that which eats out life and health and spreads poison through the soul. Such is the desire for unblessed knowledge—the old snare spread by the Devil in Eden for incautious feet when he whispered that they might become as gods, knowing good and evil, and that the Lord their God was doing them a wrong in restraining them by His command and prohibition. How does that Cross of the Lord threaten and warn us of the end of setting the affections on things

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beneath, and not on the things above! And what a cry is that—what an exceeding bitter cry—which swells ever from this troubled world: “I thirst”! It was His loud cry in that darkness, made by our sins, around His sacred Head: “I thirst.” It is still the cry of humanity, unhelped, unfed, unsatisfied, because they will not go for help, for food, for satisfaction of their want, to Him. If He said, “I thirst,” it was to draw us about Him, in our thirst, as to the only source from which that thirst of ours can be supplied. For His wounded side was that Rock smitten in the wilderness, whereout flowed blood and water, that our sin might be forgiven and washed away, and that we might drink, and thirst no more for ever. And yet, how rolls forth, in heavy, hopeless waves of direful sound, that cry, “I thirst”! Yes; I thirst for pleasure; I thirst for fame and reputation; I thirst for human friendship and human love, for the praise of men, for the consciousness of superiority over

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others, for the means of applauding myself; perhaps I thirst for low delights, for dainty meats, for strong drink, for fine and showy apparel, for the scenes of revelry and dissipation; I thirst for power, place, a name to live, for flattery and compliments; I thirst for information, for mastery of the secrets of nature, for the knowledge of good and evil; alas! I may be a-hungered and cold and poor, and I thirst for what I see others have, and to be well-to-do, and comfortable, and at my ease, like them. O poor, dissatisfied, harassed, and troubled race! O scene of eager and hopeless longing and desire, on which this Cross looks down, telling that everlasting truth which men as everlastingly decline to believe! There is no relief from it, excepting in the Cross and that for which it stands. Sayest thou, "It cannot satisfy me"? So be it. Those things on which elsewhere thou art setting thy heart shall never do for thee what this Cross could do; thy thirst can never be satisfied; thou shalt

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go thus, wretched and tormented, from loss to loss, all the days of thy life. The Cross, and that for which it stands, and He for whom it stands—this only can refresh the soul. “And He showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal”; and on the bank thereof stands the figure of the Cross, and diamonds cover it, and their light is reflected in that living flood.

The Sixth Word.

ST. JOHN XIX. 30.

Christ's Finished Work.

The Sixth Word.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost.—ST. JOHN xix. 30.

WHAT have we next to think of? what next to hear? This is the last word but one. Towards the end comes the peace. In the seventh word it is attained—God's gift of perfect rest. This sixth word indicates that the end of the Passion is near, the end of Christ's Passion, the end of their passion who will end it in His. When all is finished man enters into rest.

Consummatum est! Did our dear Master ever utter a more satisfying word, a word which goes more straight to the weary soul? What does the soul long for, if not for an end

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in which to be content and at peace, for the term of strife, for the final closing up of agitation, debate, dispute? What weariness is that occasioned by the monotony of ceaseless questioning without apparent hope of answer, by the burden of having matters kept open as if they were never to be closed? The day brings before us some confusing and much-involved subject. It was there last week, and yesterday; it is here to-day; apparently we shall be still tormented with it to-morrow. It is confused and perplexing. Opinions vary greatly about it. They are diverse and innumerable; no two men seem to think alike; one thinks one thing, another thinks something else. Parties are formed, with leaders, names, and watch-words, and fight begins. No one can say where truth is. The miserable thing vexes the community by day, and haunts our dreams at night. Oh that suspense were ended! Oh that we could hear some voice announcing, "It is finished; it is settled;

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and you shall have no more annoyance from this disturber of your peace"!

Such was that voice which spake from the Cross. Jesus settled once for all certain things, blessed be He that He did so! And among the things settled for us were these: the truth which men long to know; the end to which they should aspire; the manner in which only it is safe to walk. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." That announcement made a finished work. It marked the limit to reasonable debate. It met those who want to know in whom and in what to believe, and realise what it is to simmer and broil on the gridiron of perpetual doubt and uncertainty. It reminds us of the first creative word, to which, indeed, it may be taken as a parallel: "Let there be light: and there was light." So, "Let it be finished: and it is finished." Finished for wise and understanding spirits; finished for the saints on earth and the souls of the faithful in Paradise. There are no super-

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seding truths. There is to be no new gospel. No religion can be devised or invented to take the place of ours or do for man what ours does. There is no progression towards a point where Christ and His things shall pass from human sight. Christ grows not old; He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." The Cross stands firm; and so shall it stand till the end of the world. In this sense we understand the statement of the Divine Saviour, "It is finished."

Wherefore this Cross, which speaks to us of Jesus Christ completing and consummating a perfect work, is precious beyond any symbol that we know. We have joy and peace in believing. We know whom we have believed. We are not the children of disobedience, driven about by every wind of doctrine, but obedient children, the eyes of whose understanding are enlightened. "God forbid that we should glory, save in the Cross of Christ," and in the light which

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streams forth from it, making the way plain before the face.

But, as heretofore, so now again, listen to the rebuke of this Cross—its last rebuke, and perhaps the most stern and terrible of all. It sets its ban, it throws its darkest shadow, on the quarters where they preach new gospels and pretend to see new Christs. How much of that is in the world to-day! How constant the excited cry, “Lo, here is Christ!” or, “Lo, He is there!” They begin by some slight changes in the system framed by the Lord; they go on to others still more presumptuous; then, worst of all, they put all their doubts and all their infidelities into a philosophic theory which breathes throughout of rebellion against the Lord, of which the principles are direct contradictions of what He told us for our joy and peace. “It is *not* finished,” say they, these enemies of the Cross of Christ; “it is *not* finished. We are still moving on; we are looking for the Christ that is to be. We shall see this old

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system wear out and pass away like a show, and another come in, better adapted to our needs. We are dethroning Jesus as a God, and reducing Him to His real place; we are disestablishing that Church which He built into the souls and consciences of men. New Christs are coming, who shall do us good. Nothing is finished. What men have had these nineteen hundred years is not sufficient for them now. The Law passed away, and the Gospel is passing away; and we, apostles of reason, are the heralds of an improved religion. We cannot yet discern its outline; we cannot say what form it shall take; we cannot give it a name: but it is coming, and will presently assert its power." Against such wild heresy as this the Cross sends forth its strongest protest: "The enemies of the Cross of Christ, whose end is destruction." Many shall come in His Name, saying, "I am Christ." "There shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall show great signs and

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wonders": "But go ye not after them; believe them not." That is the threatening message from the Cross towards the ending of the day, as the sun is declining and the night draws on. That is contained, conveyed, reiterated, year after year, century after century, in the "*Consummatum est*."

There will, no doubt, be men in all times till the end, and in great numbers, who cannot take Christ's word, with what it contains, and simply confess that it is finished. They cannot believe it, because they cannot forget self and be content to rest in the Word of God. But His own people will hear and believe; and "they shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more," except for the assurance of sight as to those things which now they know by faith. "Keep, we beseech Thee, O Lord, Thy Church with Thy perpetual mercy." Keep it anchored to this Cross, as an anchor sure and steadfast, entering into that within the veil. By the sign of the Cross the Church triumphed

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over the old heathenism. It is still the sign of power. It speaks of a faith unchanging, a Saviour undying, an intercession unceasing, a love unfailing, a religion which cannot be destroyed, an inheritance that fadeth not away.

The Seventh Word.

ST. LUKE XXIII. 46.

Eternal Rest.

The Seventh Word.

And when Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend My spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost.—ST. LUKE xxiii. 46.

“Hold Thou Thy Cross before my closing eyes :
Shine through the gloom, and point me to the
skies :
Heaven’s morning breaks, and earth’s vain shadows flee :
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.”

In life, in death. Great is man’s need in life; greater his need in death. But whether we live, may we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, may we die unto the Lord. And so,

“In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.”

There is no peace like that in which Christ’s Passion ends—none so deep, be-

cause there was never sorrow like unto His; and the peace which now comes is one which passeth understanding. Of this peace, lastly, the Cross speaks to our souls.

But, then, to gain that peace the former lessons of the Cross must have been studied and, according to our ability, put in practice. The way for such peace as this is prepared: by the forgiveness of enemies and by being in perfect charity with the world; by frequent meditation on that vast eternal state wherein death shall leave us; by the conscientious discharge of duty to those amongst whom our lot has been cast; by submission to God's holy disciplining will, whatever it may impose; by habitual longing and thirst for union with Him; by glad acceptance of His revelation of Himself through His Well-Beloved Son. Such practice be ours, and that shall bring a man peace at the last.

Once more let us give attention to the solemn lesson from the Cross, before night falls, and stars come out like lamps lit in

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the skies of evening, and the day of grace is past and gone. Remember: these messages from the Cross of Jesus Christ are always double, befitting the attitude of minds, the state of souls. The Cross lifts up, it casts down; it acquits, it also condemns. Christ saves, He likewise judges; and, meanwhile, one man is taken, and another is left. Of what can you think with such secret and strange apprehension as of the coming of the end and the long-expected arrival of man's last adversary? Yet is there a dread within that dread—another and a greater dread: the dread of unprepared, evil death. *“From sudden, unprepared, and evil death, Good Lord, deliver us!”* Such is death when the dying man is not helped by the Cross, because he did not love it in his life, nor trust to it, or, worse, because he may have been its enemy. Oh, at such a moment, if there be power to feel, what must be felt by one who knows that the Holy Cross is nothing to him, who

has no friend, no Saviour, on earth or beyond it, to whom the sight of Calvary brings no gleam of hope? This Cross is the object which men and women have prized and loved more than aught else in the world; which they have worn on their hearts, unseen by companion or friend; which travellers in strange lands have kept on the person, that, in case of accident or death, they might be known for disciples of Christ; from which they have learned the best they ever knew; which has been to them an instructor in faith, hope, and charity; on which they have strained their dying eyes; under which sign, in the catacombs of old, and now in the quiet churchyard and God's-acre, the bones and dust await their resurrection. And this Cross, so dear, so precious, so far beyond all estimate in value, of what must it speak to the miserable creature dying out of Christ? He cannot evade its censure and reproof; it stands there to condemn, and its shadow

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falls on his death-bed, long and black and still.

But let this Cross be to us for comfort and peace when for us also the inevitable hour arrives. "Thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness." The darkness comes of our three enemies, Sin, Pain, and Death. On this Cross Christ has made full satisfaction for the sin of the whole world. On this Cross Christ has borne such pain as martyr never knew, that we may be comforted and strengthened, whatever we have to bear. On this Cross hath Jesus died, and thus we learn of Jesus Christ to die. And now is the time to learn it; now, in time of health, in time of prosperity, prepare to die. Now, when the brain is clear, and the mind unclouded, and the frame is in health and sound, now learn to die. Sickness is not the time to prepare for death. Disease, with its attendant distresses and torments, must render it impossible to come thoughtfully

and calmly to God. Fever, hallucinations, wandering of mind, excitement through stimulants, and anxiety through nervous distress—are these the helpers to him who sees that he must make ready for an interview with his Judge, and needs the fulness of his powers to prepare for that dread meeting? The sick man knows too well that it is the worst of all times for him to prepare for death. The thoughtless, if well-meaning, physician hides the truth from him; knowing that he is about to die, the physician encourages him to think that he is *not* to die. O fatal error! to put off repentance till our sins forsake us, and not we our sins—till the power of sinning is gone! To be to us a help and comfort in death, this Cross must have been our true and beloved companion in life. And if so, the fear of death is gone. It is dead on that Cross on which our sins are dead, on which one is crucified with Christ; and blessed are they who thus suffer crucifixion,

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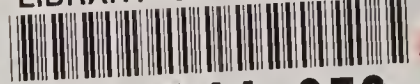
for they rise again to a better hope, and perfect love casts out their fears.

It is now time to depart hence and return each to his own place. But as we go let us take with us thoughtful hearts and, still better, anxious hearts. Thoughtful must we be if indeed moved by the recital of the Passion once again, and anxious lest we may have received this grace to no purpose. When the sun went down upon Jerusalem, the memory of the things which had occurred that day was already beginning to fade as the people resumed the tenor of their life, and entered into their occupations, and took up their work, and resumed their pleasures; and so for a while they forgot what had happened, and the world went on as before. So is it with many when Lent and Holy Week are ended; they go their way and straightway forget. But let it not be so with us, and let us carry hence impressions too deeply stamped upon the mind

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and heart to be easily effaced. As we recede from the mountain whereon the great Master has taught us His favourite lesson, let it be with a resolve to practise it and find out what it means; and let us try to keep that Sacred Hill always in view, on the horizon of our journey; and let us watch the Cross, that it may be to us like that pillar of cloud and fire which led Israel through the wilderness. So watched, and watching over us, the Cross shall be at last the sign of final victory over every foe, and the pledge of the life of the world to come; its lessons well learned, its warnings duly heeded; our own in life, in death. “Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord.” “For I am the Resurrection, and the Life,” saith the Lord: “he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.”

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